THE ROMANCE OF A PRIEST

BY REVEREND PAUL A. KELLY

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TO MARY

The Virgin Mother of Christ
The Priest's Spiritual Mother
This Volume Is
Affectionately Inscribed

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PREFACE

IN *the first chapter of this volume, the reader will find a definition of romance which by many would be placed in the preface.*

A Spiritual Romance establishes a concordat between the soul and God. It is more difficult to explain and define than romance between two creatures, primarily because of the relationship between the creature and the Creator, and again because less has been written upon the subject.

In the sphere of human romance, we have the very remarkable dialogue "De la Lecture des Vieux Romans," written by Chapelain about 1650, which is a surprising defense of the subject. In the English tongue alone more than thirty erudite authors have explored the open and remote regions of Romanticism. In our language undoubtedly the most valuable single contribution to the knowledge of the subject is Ward's Catalogue of Romances in the British Museum.

In the world of spiritual romance no writer has, to this date, catalogued or classified the subject. The world

of spiritual love, which has no forbidden countries, must be explored to be known. The feeble effort of the writer in the pages that follow is not intended as a sketch-map of the domain of sacerdotal romance. It is written to allow a glance into certain phases of the love of the priest with his God. It was written at the request of a friend (who is not a Christian), to whom an explanation of the ideals of a Christian Priest were presented in answer to his defense of the classical assumption that love is an inferior motive.

It is true that Goethe wrote that "Classicism is health—Romanticism is disease," but that gifted writer knew full well the limitations of his declaration. All admit the distinction between the "Classic" and "Romantic" but it must be remembered that every life is a romance of Divine Love.

I am indebted to Miss Blanche Mary Kelly, Litt.D., Professor of English Literature at the College of Mt. St. Vincent, New York City, for her kindness in assisting me with the revision of the manuscript and for her correction of the proof.

The Author

Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 1926

CHAPTER I

Love Is Eternal

I

LOVE IS ETERNAL

IN its primary meaning the substantive "Romance" recalls to our mind the tales in verse written originally in one of the Romance dialects, and depicting a story of heroic or marvelous incidents derived from history or legend, such as the Arthurian romances. The gradual development of the English language after the invasion of the "Romance-speaking strangers," at the time of the Norman Conquest, has resulted in a new meaning for the noun "Romance," which now implies a blending of the heroic, the marvelous, the mysterious in actions, manners, ideas,

language, or literature. For the Levite the term *romance* should be understood in this sense of the word as often as it is recalled in this volume.

In every true romance, certain factors are present which are not ordinarily discerned by the onlooker. This idea is so common that men and women are often incapable of realizing the reason why two souls have apparently found their affinity. If this be true for human romance is it not natural that, on the part of mankind in general, there should be a misunderstanding of the romance of the priesthood?

The romance of the Levite is the gradual development in his soul of the realization of his Creator. In a Christian sense, it follows the presence of God's grace. In itself it is a grace; in its ultimate finale it is a great grace. The future ecclesiastic must feel the call to become a man of God. This vocation is of various degrees and is often in proportion to the man's earnestness and his co-operation with God's grace. The fact that God is ever present;

the truth that God discerns each action; the knowledge that God yearns for his love, are prime factors in the romance of the priest. In the order named, the presence of God, the reality of God, the loveliness of God, share in the general growth of the sacerdotal romance.

That God is ever present is not as discernible as the presence of a material being, but the truth of His presence cannot for that reason be denied. Verily it can be said that the forces most vital in life are forces which, as a rule, are not readily discernible, forces to which few men advert. For a certain proof of this statement, let us take the speed of the earth's motion. The earth travels at the velocity of about a thousand miles an hour, i.e., in twenty-four hours it completes an entire revolution, and the circumference around the Equator is well nigh 24,000 miles. Hence we and every being on the earth travel at the tremendous rapidity of sixteen and two-third miles a minute and the fact is so commonplace that few stop to consider it.

Again, in the very space we now occupy

sound waves are passing, continuing their voyage possibly *ad infinitum.* Music, song, laughter, mirth and speech are in the air, but how many stop and listen? However, take a radio into the same space, tune in on any broadcasting station. If you get receptivity, you immediately hear human voices, instrumental music, etc. No person would state that the radio causes the music, that the radio causes speech. It is only the instrument whereby you hear, the instrument whereby human voices are brought to you. These voices are always in the air, but our sense of hearing is not sufficiently attuned to register the sound wave or to receive a sensitive impression.

Let us take another example of a vital force that is ever present while we are living and to which we seldom advert. Pierce a small opening at your finger-tip and press through one tiny drop of blood. Let this drop of blood fall on the plate of the microscope. Next look at that drop of blood through the microscope. What do you behold? A field of red and white corpuscles and other ingredients. That tiny

drop of blood is intensified. You see life within life, microcosm within corpuscles. That vision has a special significance to the trained pathologist. Its blood-count tells him the condition of your health. If the speed of the earth's rotation and revolution causes wonder and amazement, what surprises come to the student who investigates the velocity of the blood-motion through the body! Medical science narrates that three times every two minutes there is a complete circulation of blood through the arteries and veins of a normal person. Hence every forty seconds there is a complete circulation of all the blood in a human body through the heart.

As a final example let us consider the lymphatic system. Lymph is blood minus red corpuscles, or the white corpuscles plus the blood liquid. The function of the lymph is to bathe those areas of the tissues which are not reached by the blood and to carry off from them waste products. In a manner, the lymph is the middleman between the blood and the tissues. It begins to work where the blood

leaves off. The circulation of the lymphatic system is just as marvelous as the circulation of the blood. Mystery surrounding the rapidity of its travel makes the study of it more alluring.

These examples of vital forces which are ever present but of which men rarely think, are given in order to parallel to some extent the presence of Him who created all, whose dominion reaches every sphere, whose Providence takes care even of the birds of the air and the inhabitants of the deepest seas, but to whom few of us advert and whose presence signifies so little to many of the children of man.

The Levite, by the nature of his vocation, must pay attention to God's voice as it speaks to him in a hundred tongues each day, by means of His creatures and creation. The quicker he learns this language of Nature's God, the swifter is his romance. The more intense becomes his realization of God's wonders and God's omnipotent attributes, the more eager will he be for more knowledge of the infinite, and, with knowledge of God, love follows as a corollary. Is it possible to love and

not to serve? If love is true, service for the beloved is the greatest pleasure. Service implies mediate sacrifice or immediate union. To be alone with, to be united to the Beloved is the final endeavor of romance. In the preparatory steps of sacerdotal love the existence of God, the omniscience, the omnipresence of the absolute Being must become a reality.

This stage of credibility having arrived, no sacrifice is too great, no preparation is too long for ultimate union with the Beloved. The longer the journey, the more difficult the obstacles to be overcome, the more self-denials to the inner man on the road to the priesthood, the greater the intensity of the love between the future priest and his God. Sacrifice is usually irksome but love can make it a joy, and the realization of God's love for man, especially in sending His only-begotten Son into the world, can make it a supreme joy.

Finally the day arrives in the romance of a priest in which he is to give his body, his mind, his heart and his soul to God. No person except a priest can realize what that day signi-

fies. To illustrate these chapters of the Levite's romance let us make an analogy with human romance. As a comparison we shall contrast the stages of the romance of a man and a maid with developments in the romance of the priest and his God, in order to bring to every mind more clearly a phase of sacerdotal romance which is not known and often misunderstood. We learn by going from the known to the unknown. Who is the man or woman who is not familiar with the salient elements which constitute the romance of a man and his bride? How many, considering the immense population of the world, realize the significance of the ideal of the Christian priest?

CHAPTER II

The Culmination of the Priest's Romance — Ordination

II

THE CULMINATION OF THE PRIEST'S ROMANCE— ORDINATION

THE joyous culmination of earthly romance comes into some human lives daily, during the ecclesiastical year, excepting the periods commemorative of the years of expectation of the Messias, and the days of His fast and abstinence in the desert. Go in spirit to one of the old cathedrals of Europe. Enter its massive doors, marvel at its architecture, its frescoes and its paintings. While you are within, the Angelus bells sound once more the Salutation of Gabriel to Mary. High noon is registered. Suddenly, the music of a wedding march attracts your attention. You hasten to the main altar of the cathedral. You behold a bridal party enter the sacred sanctuary. They mount to the highest step of

the altar. The pastor of the church, like the high priest of the Old Law, meets them. To him as to a representative of God, to themselves and to the witnesses, the groom and bride utter those sacred words which attest their love and devotion; words whose utterance takes such a short space of time but whose rendering forms part of a contract; words which made Jesus Himself say, "What, therefore, God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." [1] The nuptial Mass begins, the Sacrifice of Calvary is repeated in an unbloody manner, the words of the blessings of the Church are uttered. In a solemn manner a sacred union is ratified. Ask the romancers their sentiments on that day and the usual answer is, "This is the happiest day of our lives."

Go again to the same ancient cathedral. The day is known in the Church calendar as Pentecost Saturday. The decorations are scarlet. The roses on the main altar are crimson. The old pillars are garbed in honor of the feast of Pentecost, the birthday of the Church.

[1] Mark X. 9.

Approach the altar. There you gaze upon the bishop and many priests. What is being enacted? The Mass of Ordination. Who is kneeling vested in white alb? The young deacon, the prospective priest. Today is his wedding-day; with his heart full of joy, with his soul sending forth anthems of love and thanksgiving to his Creator, he has passed through the different stages on the journey to the priesthood. Long years before, possibly as a little boy, he first heard the call. Its echo was not as strong as the voice which called Samuel, but its significance was as manifest. In a life of flux, that vocation has been changeless, and even in the solemn Introit of Pentecost the bishop sounds for him the sweetest music he has heard up to that moment. Yahweh was calling all the time and now the culmination is near at hand. "Exult unto the God of Jacob." The Sacrifice of the Mass continues. The Gradual is read. The time has arrived for the bishop to ordain. The priest-to-be ascends the altar step, and a representative of the Bishop of Rome, a successor of the

Apostles, a prelate who has been legitimately empowered to consecrate and ordain, changes the deacon of yesterday into the priest of today. In all the world's history there is no picture so beautiful as the vivid, vitalized portrait of the priest of the New Law attesting his love for the Trinity and for God's Church. He stands alone, but, hidden from material eyes, God is at his side. In the purity of that hour how many equals has he among men? Those outside the Church but little understand the meaning of that sacrifice, but to those who peer beneath the surface it historically binds again the Church to the chaste Christ, to the unmarried John, to the celibate Paul. In the panorama of the world's sacrifices it establishes another vow for life, among those pledges which man regards as the sacrifice supreme. Are you able to measure the young Levite's happiness? At that moment are you able to measure the degrees of heat at the earth's center? No. But if you ask that romancer his sentiments, he will reply, "This is the happiest day of my life."

CHAPTER III

The First Mass

III

THE FIRST MASS

THE DAY of days, that of the first High Mass of the priest, has arrived. The priest according to the order of Melchisedech is about to ascend the altar of Sacrifice. As the High Priest in ancient Salem offered bread and wine to the living God, so now the priest of the New Law goes forward to offer to the Heavenly Father the slain Body of the God-Man in a mystic manner under the appearances of bread and wine. This first solemn High Mass is said in the new priest's parish church. If his parents are living they exult with him, but in a sense on that day he is alone. It is a truth that the day a deacon receives the sacerdotal dignity, at that very moment he leaves his father's and mother's house. From that moment he becomes a man of God. Their other sons may

go into the professions of medicine or law or dentistry. They may go into the fields of science or social service. They may go into the marts of trade or the field of battle, but they always occupy the same status in their home. But the priest becomes an *alter Christus*. If mother complains, he must reiterate the words of Christ in the Temple: "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?"[1] Hence, on that day of his first Mass, notwithstanding the presence of father and mother, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends, the priest is alone. Christ, disguised in the tabernacle under the appearance of bread, takes him unto His own. We hear the Son of Mary saying, "My desire is to be with the children of men. I yearn for love. This is another lover. He must go forth and feed My lambs."

If the greatest cathedrals of Europe can be termed "frozen music," if the Moses of Michelangelo can be termed "living stone," if a Madonna of Raphael can be called "a chaste woman in grandeur," if some of the sonatas

[1] St. Luke II. 49.

of Beethoven can be described as "strains of music from heaven," what phrase can express the picture which the priest portrays to mankind on the day of his first Mass? On that blessed day faith seems to come nearest to metaphysical certainty. On that day his purpose and resolve seem the highest in this material sphere. Day apparently envelops night, light absorbs darkness. Winter is embraced by summer; peace triumphs over war. Virtue for a moment seemingly has conquered sin. Man is victorious over his passions. Heaven comes nearer to earth. Why? Because a man has given his body and soul to his God; and, in the Mass that follows, bread becomes flesh and under the appearance of bread, Christ, the man, is God.

CHAPTER IV

Bethlehem

IV

BETHLEHEM

IN THE history of human romance there is a period happier in the lives of lovers than the day of their wedding. It is the day of the birth of their offspring. When a father and mother behold a living infant, flesh of their flesh, bone of their bone, an inheritor of their fortunes, an heir to carry on their name, they both exclaim, "This is the happiest day of our lives!"[1] Investigating the romance of a priest we learn that a moment comes into his life when happiness seems complete and, as in human romance, birth affirms the omnipotence of the Deity.

That moment takes place at the consecration of the Mass. As the skilled pathologist takes a drop of blood, and by means of the microscope and his years of scientific study estab-

[1] Luke XXII. 19.

lishes accurate data as to the health or infirmity of his patient, so the priest, after the words of consecration of the Mass, with his eyes of faith sees Jesus Christ, His Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, really and truly present in His sacramental presence. The Son of Mary is born again, born in a mystical manner, to be slain in an unbloody sacrifice which is to continue to the end of time. In that moment heaven seems a little nearer; the mystery of the Incarnation loses some of its mysterious significance, for Jesus the Messias has come, not disguised as a feeble Babe, but in the most humble manner possible, a lifeless portion of unleavened bread, so insignificant that if it were not elevated by faith reason would not tolerate the drama.

If the birth of man causes joy to man, evidently the nativity of the Mass fulfils the will of God, for on the night of the Last Supper Christ said, "Do this in commemoration of Me." If the day of ordination is a day of happiness in the life of a priest, the consecration in the Mass adds another and higher degree of

felicity. For at that moment the Last Supper becomes a reality, Gethsemane is distant only a few hundred paces; Judas is seen administering his traitorous kiss, even Peter's denial is re-echoed. Annas and Caiphas make their appearance, the cowardly Pilate ascends his judgment seat, the fickle mob are clamorous in their lust for Christ's Blood, and a robber assassin is given his unconditional freedom. The silence and meekness of Jesus are paralleled by the muteness and submissiveness of the consecrated Host.

The vision awakened by the realization of the abjectness of Christ under the appearance of bread begets an understanding of the rejected Saviour on the dolorous way to Calvary. The Crucifixion's message is understood anew and with such striking reality, that the exclamation of the centurion is uttered almost unconsciously: "Indeed this was the Son of God!" No language can at that moment picture the sentiments, the feelings of gratitude of the priest to his Maker, to his Creator, to his Redeemer for the gift of his vocation.

Faith has its own language. In its absolute moments of credibility no human language can express the motives of belief. The realization of the consecration of the Host finds utterance in two exclamations: "Lord, it is good for us to be here!" "I believe—help Thou my unbelief!" If the happiness of parents over the new child come into the world is what it is who can fathom the excessive joy of the priest, when, morning after morning, the birth of Christ is mystically repeated? The Messias lives again. The Word is made flesh and dwells amongst us. This is the pathos of the reality. In ancient times He came unto His own and they received Him not. Today, every day, He comes even in manner more meek than that of the Babe of Bethlehem and His own creatures receive Him not. "But as many as received Him, He gave them power to be made the sons of God . . . who are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."[1]

[1] John I. 13.

CHAPTER V

Union With God

V

UNION WITH GOD

IT IS a well-known fact that in human romance a day comes which surpasses all other days of pure love. That moment of felicity arrives when a parent is approached by her own child, who, embracing her with a rapture of filial affection exclaims, "Mother, I love you!" Among human affections who can measure the depth of a mother's love? When the son or daughter reciprocates the love of parents, who is the man to fathom that love?

The love of parents and child is stronger than the love of man and wife, for it is not uncommon to see a man leave his wife for the sake of his child should he feel that his wife is neglecting their offspring. Nor is it uncommon to learn of a wife leaving her husband for the sake of her child, for is not the child

flesh of her flesh, blood of her blood? In the romance of the Levite the time approaches which brings him felicity supreme. This moment arrives when, in the Sacrifice of the Mass, Communion takes place, "union with God." At that blessed period the soul of the priest is lovingly embraced, not by a creature in existence only to die, but by the living Christ—concealed, it is true, in the habiliments of bread, but in reality the God-Man; in essence the same Christ who trod Mother Earth, who loved and was loved, who lived and bore our sins upon a tree, who humbled Himself that we might be exalted, who died that we might live, who rose from the dead that men might be given definite testimony that they will rise. If in human romance there is no moment happier than when the child shows his affection to his parent, it is certain that in the romance of the priest there is no happier moment than when Christ comes in Holy Communion. The spiritual embrace of Christ revivifies every portion of man's body and soul, for the union of Christ and the

communicant is the closest relationship that ever occurs during man's pilgrimage on earth.

For Christ in Holy Communion with His Body reanimates our body, with His Blood invigorates our blood, with His Soul spiritualizes our soul, and with His Divinity inspires with energy and activity our humanity. This union is so complete that contemplation of its meaning causes man to marvel that the infinite Creator, through His intense love for the rational creature, should have left the greatest proof of His immensity and His omnipotence in the institution of the Eucharist. This Sacrament is so great that finite man often senses only its humility. But the lesson of its humility only intensifies the realization of the infinite. The personal Deity has left this for a memorial of the Son's death. *"Immensus Pater, immensus Filius, immensus Spiritus Sanctus, sed non tres immensi, sed unus immensus."*

CHAPTER VI

The Daily Embrace Of Christ

VI

THE DAILY EMBRACE OF CHRIST

INTO the life of the priest Christ comes daily, without doubt as an answer to that rendition of the *Pater Noster* in Saint Matthew: "Give us this day our supersubstantial bread." He comes as spiritual food to the wayfarer, man, and since daily food is necessary for the normal nourishment of the body, the Church, Christ's Spouse, recommends daily Communion for the normal nutriment of the soul. Thus every day, into the life of the priest, comes the privilege of lisping David's inspired Canticles, of walking in the purer, more rarified air of those Fra Angelico angels who, in picture as in fact, surround the altar-throne. Myriads of spiritual and floral bouquets deck the altar. The undulations of the rifts and waves of incense

mark the solemnity of the Offertory prayer. Candles in the purest vesture light with welcoming splendor the pathway of the King of kings. Nor is praise lacking from man and child, for songs that bring peace and serenity echo from the choir and earth is full of His glory; Hosanna in Excelsis! Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord! Hosanna in the Highest!

So Christ comes every morning, and He will come until the end of the world. "He came to cast fire on the earth and what wills He but that it be kindled?"[1] The priest intones the Agnus Dei: "Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on us!"

In an instant the celebrant about to utter the words that centuries of use have not dulled, that recall him who believed with greater faith than any man in Israel and shall we repeat? Not an Israelite but a stranger *"Domine, 'non sum dignus:'* Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof, but only say the word, and my soul shall be healed."[2]

[1] Luke XII. 49. [2] Matt. VIII. 8.

The chimes, the *Domine, non sum dignus* bells, carry to the farthest corners of the church or oratory the sound-waves of those words and in their own language, according to the law of ratio, carry the message of Communion time. Early in the day the church bell chanted the prologue of Christ's daily "feast of love." Now, as an epilogue to a drama, the acolyte raises the clapper and as it strikes the metal, behold—the solemn music understood—a devout procession glides on its way. It rests at the Communion rail. In its compactness it typifies the mystic meaning of the bread and wine on the altar. As the Catechism of the Council of Trent tells us: "The wheaten bread made from many grains of wheat grown in various places, the wine pressed from many grapes of different vines and vineyards, clearly declare that we, though many, are most closely bound together by the bond of this divine mystery and made one."

Added to the privilege of partaking of the Redeemer's Body and Blood, the man who immolates the Victim is now about to handle

that pure Body and carry Him to the children of men. Turning to the communicants who are about to taste and see how sweet is the Lord, the Levite calls them to attention: *"Ecce, Agnus Dei!* Behold the Lamb of God, Behold Him who taketh away the sins of the world!" Thrice again he repeats the *Domine, non sum dignus:* "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof, but only say the word, and my soul shall be healed."

The lesson of the Eucharist is absolute humility. At the introduction of the reception of the life-sustaining Wheat and the Creator's blossoming Vine, the Church arrays her prayerful song in those meek words: "Lord, I am not worthy." Truer words never were spoken, for what creature, even though wreathed in the plentitude of grace, is worthy of the Spotless Lamb of God?

The communicants receive His Body, receive His Blood, but the form of that Communion Sacrament is individually repeated: *"Corpus Domini nostri Jesu Christi, custodiat animam tuam in vitam aeternam. Amen."* "May the

Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ watch over thy soul unto life everlasting. Amen." This utterance epitomizes, for the Christian pilgrim, an accurate expression of the meaning of the Eucharist, the object of which is to implant among us the spiritual fermentation and leaven of immortality. The Mass that brings the stainless Lover is a service of exquisite sweetness. The Mass conveys to the priest the opportunity to drink Life at the Fountain of Life. Moreover, the Mass brings grace, which is supernatural life, a sharing in the life of God, for the plentitude of grace means life eternal, communion with God forever inseparable, union with the Deity. "He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood, hath everlasting life: and I will raise him up in the Last Day."[1]

[1] John VI. 55.

CHAPTER VII

Jesus Has Conquered Death

VII

JESUS HAS CONQUERED DEATH

ALTHOUGH in a mystical sense Christ is slain and immolated daily, nevertheless during the ecclesiastical year, which has its days, weeks, and months, the entire life of Christ is renewed. For as the law of life is change and mutation, so each day during the year there is a change in the superstructure of prayers and Scripture lessons. The keynote of the Mass spirit, the keynote of the spiritual music—the Introit varies with the other changeable portions of the Mass, typifying in a changefulness like our own, Christ's life on earth. Hence every Christmas is born again the wondrous Babe, teaching man the prodigious truth of the Creator's love for His creatures. Again He is brought to the Temple, again His flight into

Egypt is accomplished, again He returns after the death of His persecutors. We find Him in the Temple at the age of twelve. His hidden life for eighteen years is dramatized. Ash Wednesday recalls, for the Church, the initial day of His fast and abstinence from food and drink for forty days and nights. Joyfully, with anthems of praise, Christ fulfils, on Holy Thursday, the promise made at the miraculous multiplication of the bread and fishes at Genesareth Lake.

On Good Friday Christ's death takes place, and the sadness of that day would be difficult to bear were not His triumphant feast of feasts, His Resurrection Mass, so near at hand to provide us with additional motives for credibility. We see Him rise triumphant over death. Where no man has conquered He has been victorious. Christ fulfilled His own prophecy: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will rebuild it." Christ's Ascension into heaven is followed closely by the coming of the Paraclete. What a joyous day for the priest—Christ's Spouse, the Church, has her birthday: Pentecost has

come! The Holy Ghost, the third Person of the Blessed Trinity, has taken up His abode with the "Beauty that is ever ancient but always new," to abide with her forever and to guide her in the way of holiness and truth. Thus yearly does the Church re-live Christ's life, and in the romance of the priest, each year intensifies the realization of God's goodness to man, and each day's union with God reaffirms the immensity of the Creator. Miraculous deed!

However, the miracle of the miracles is Transubstantiation. It is greater, in a sense, than Christ's Resurrection, His Passion, His Ascension, for these were manifestations of power over His own Person. But in the Eucharist He changes the material substance of bread and wine into His own Body and Blood, and causes them to partake of the Hypostatic Union with the Deity. The drama of the Mass, whether understood either as the life or death of Christ extended throughout the ecclesiastical year, or His daily birth and slaying, is the greatest consolation in this vale of tears.

In a world of sordid gain, where so often what is material grasps and chokes what is spiritual, in a world of shame, hypocrisy, and pretense, in a world where sin and the most pitiful suffering are found on the same avenue and thoroughfare, the fragrance of Christ's charity is spread abroad from the flowing thurible of His Body, in which, through the ministry of the priest, the living fire is kept always alight.

The priest is His legate; the Sacrament of the altar is the message which the ambassador must carry from the greatest King to the children of men. Hence, to understand the romance of a priest, it is necessary to learn this lesson of Transubstantiation. Those who are not Christians should strive to look into the belief of the Church in reference to the Eucharist, otherwise they will never appreciate the significance of the priest's romance nor be able intelligently to narrate it to others.

CHAPTER VIII

Baptism and Penance

VIII

BAPTISM AND PENANCE

IN THE spiritual life grace is as necessary for the vital existence of the spirit as the flowing of the vital fluid through the arteries and veins of the human body is requisite for physical health. The Church divides the Sacraments into two classifications: Baptism and Penance, called Sacraments of the Dead because they are able to bring spiritual life or sanctifying grace into the soul, and Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Holy Orders, Extreme Unction and Matrimony, called Sacraments of the Living, because to receive them properly the soul must be in the state of grace. It is in the administration of Baptism and Penance that the priest experiences, next to the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, the real romance of his vocation. A child or an adult is brought to him for

Baptism. Looking upon the child he beholds a descendant of Adam, a soul blemished with one stain, the sin of origin. Mother Church in her exorcisms, in her prayers, in the anointing, which form the liturgy for the Sacrament of Baptism, manifests her motive, her purpose, in allowing this Sacrament to be conferred.

Beholding that child after its Baptism, with eyes of faith the priest sees a new birth in the spiritual order, a soul redeemed by the precious Blood of Christ, now made a child of God, cleansed from original sin and made an heir of heaven, a soul so pure at that moment that in reality it is a little bit of heaven. This spiritual regeneration, this new birth of the soul into the life of sanctifying grace, is not a joy for one day during the year. No, averaging the total for the year, it comes, in a busy city parish, nearly every other day.

If the administration of Baptism to an infant is a joy, assuredly the administration of the same Sacrament to an adult is a greater privilege. To share in the adult's faith, to partake of his happiness on the day when he is formally

adopted as a son in the legal court whose records are ratified in heaven, on the day when he becomes an inheritor of a mansion in his Father's kingdom, is an experience that is long remembered and adds tremendously to the alluring features of the priest's romance. For it is true that the priest's vocation allures to a better world. Outside the Catholic Church confession is often misunderstood, but to a Catholic, always excepting the Holy Eucharist, the reception of no Sacrament brings so much peace and comfort, so much spiritual joy and contentment, as does the Sacrament of Penance. This Sacrament awakens a greater appreciation of God's mercy and forgiveness. It manifests the tenderness of the Creator for the rational creature, man. The parables of Christ concerning the Prodigal Son and the Lost Sheep live in reality. The Magdalen assumes flesh and blood, and Dismas, the penitent Thief, enters once again into paradise.

No pen can express the feeling of gratitude of the sinner after a sincere confession, after the absolute realization that his sins have been

forgiven by Him who long ago said, "If your sins be as scarlet they shall be made as white as snow."[1] Penance, like Baptism, brings a new life to the soul, and the living Christ in His tenderness toward fallen man gave to His Apostles on the very day on which He arose from the dead the power of absolving from sin. As on Resurrection morn, by the reanimating and revitalizing of His own body, dead three days, He showed His mastery over physical life, so on the evening of Resurrection Day He appeared to His Apostles, when, with the exception of Thomas they were all gathered together, and He breathed upon them and said: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain they are retained."[2] During His public life, on the occasion when He said, "Be of good heart, son, thy sins are forgiven thee,"[3] some of the bystanders remarked, "Who can forgive sins but God only?" Christ, seeing their thoughts, said, "That you may know that the Son of

[1] Isaias I. 18. [2] John XX. 22–23. [3] Matt. IX. 2.

man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then said He to the man sick of the palsy) Arise, take up thy bed, and go into thy house,"[1] or "Arise and walk." On both occasions He conquered the physical in order to show His power over the spiritual. He instituted the Sacrament of Penance on the very day on which He rose from the dead in order, apparently, to give us greater faith in this Sacrament, which requires the greater power, since the soul is mightier than the body, and to bring back life to the soul requires a higher dominion over creation than to restore physical life. It is not unusual for a busy priest in the city to hear two hundred confessions in a week, nine hundred in a month, more than ten thousand in a year. These figures convey some idea of the spiritual joys in the life of a priest, at the knowledge of so many spiritual nativities, so many increments in the life of sanctifying grace.

Confession makes the priest a counsellor, a friend, an advocate, a physician, and a judge

[1] Matt. IX. 6.

for the penitent soul. Of the labor involved the world realizes little, but like all honest labor it has a compensation which comes only from the fact, tremendous in spiritual value, that with each morn during his active sacerdotal life more than one soul is born again. Born, it is true, to the life of the Spirit, hidden from eyes of men, but in reality, in the words of Thomas à Kempis, "Passing on into the state and freedom of the children of God, who stand above the present and fix their eyes upon eternal things." The work accomplished in the confessional can never be understood by the world, primarily because so many men have rejected Christ's divinity, secondarily because the lips of the priest are sealed forever. Human tragedy, virtue and sin, truth and calumny, heroism in high and low station, and petty revenge in the highest order of society as well as in the lowest strata, walk in their accustomed garb before him. Often the just suffer and the unjust prosper. He is a witness to the silent man, or woman, bearing reproaches and indignities because he or she

must be silent for a higher cause, while the braggart pretends he is innocent and gives a hundred false reasons for an action.

The priest sees it all but he must be silent, because silence is the language of solitude, solitude teaches seclusion, and seclusion tells him that the very forces re-animated by the return of a sinner to his God are the forces needed in our nation today. The priest in the confessional is making capital for civilization. It is being secretly invested in good deeds by a return to sound values, in the industrial, in the social, in the spiritual life of the reborn individual. Some day our hyper-civilization will need that capital. A phase of the priest's romance is the knowledge that the confessional is safeguarding this capital for the hour which he believes will come when civilization, as it is now known, will be in dire need of it. When that hour approaches—and it must come, because the world has rejected Christ, the flower of the Church's elect on earth, who have lived in sanctifying grace or, when it was lost, have striven always to seek the water from

the well, wherefrom one who drinks shall not thirst again, that flower shall save civilization and will be the nucleus that shall bring the world back to the Deity, who even at this time is hidden from so many in the impenetrable clouds of doubt.

CHAPTER IX

Matrimony

IX

MATRIMONY

MATRIMONY was raised by Christ to the dignity of a Sacrament. It is indeed deplorable that the world does not pay attention to the status of His institution in the Catholic Church, outside of which man dares to put asunder what God hath joined together. What is the outcome? In our own beloved country at least one out of every ten marriages ends in the divorce court. In her nuptial Mass the Church clothes with her most beautiful language the ritual of this mating of groom and bride. Her blessings, her prayers, her benedictions accompany the voluntary surrender of the individual lives of man and maid to that common life which they are to have for each other. The priest is the Church's witness and minister at marriage. He is the celebrant

of the nuptial Mass, he utters the Church blessings. It is not uncommon for an old pastor to unite in marriage a man and woman whom he baptized in their infancy.

The priest is not present only for the Sacrament of Matrimony. No, he follows the married couple through life as their pastor. He is their helper in adversity, their comforter in affliction, their refuge in trial and necessity. He baptizes their children, he instructs them for the reception of the Sacraments of Penance, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist. He is the most trusted friend of the family, their joys become his joys, their sorrows his sorrows. The priest is the spiritual father to the sons and daughters of men. Is it any wonder he is lovingly entitled "Father"? In the romance of his life at the altar the joys and sorrows of the families who regard him as a spiritual father, add much to the mosaic which, consciously and unconsciously, each priest forms in his life-service.

CHAPTER X

Extreme Unction

X

EXTREME UNCTION

IN THE world in which we live, sickness and ill-health exist in as great a variety of degrees as the various temperatures of heat and cold are registered on the world's weather-chart. As the man in ill-health needs a physician for the ailments of his body, so the physician of the soul is needed to care for the spirit that quickeneth the body. When death is approaching from sickness the priest is called to administer the last anointing, the Extreme Unction. From the cradle to the grave the Church is anxious to aid the pilgrim on his journey to the heavenly Jerusalem. When there is danger of death the Last Sacrament is given, and, excepting the last reception of the Lord's Body, as Viaticum, the administration of Extreme Unction gives most comfort to the dying Christian.

Death is the great leveler. Death makes equal peasant and king, death knows no social standing. All come to her portal and all must pay the same penalty for being mortal. The scenes prior to death vary with as much mutation as those who make up the fabric of society differ in their social position. The priest is not only at a death-bed scene often, but he is witness to the soul's last struggle, to the mind's last analysis of the prime factors of life. The medical doctor is there and prescribes the last potion. The attorney may be called in if the man about to die has neglected his legal affairs, but none receive the confidence, the secrets of the soul as does the minister of the Church. If life may be compared to a stage upon which we are all actors, then the priest is often the only audience of the last lines in a problem play, upon the rendering of which depends its classification as drama or tragedy. Again if life is a school and each year's living brings us into a higher grade of experience death's scene is the last night-study preparatory to the final examination which we must take in order to

participate in the great Commencement. In social value the life of the priest ranks high. But in that last scene of man on earth the priest can truly say, "In this school very few enter." To me it affords the summary of a new study of psychology; it is not taught in any university.

CHAPTER XI

The Child

XI

THE CHILD

"SUFFER the little children to come unto Me and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God."[1] Take children out of the life of man and this world would lose tremendously in faith, in hope, and in love. Mankind would become more selfish and cynical. Innocence and purity would lack their greatest concrete stimuli among mortals. Truth would want one phase of harmony with the Divine Eternal Truth that is evident in the earlier years of adolescence. In His answer to some of the Apostles who were anxious to learn who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven Christ suggested the fruitfulness of child-study for estimating spiritual values: "Amen I say to you, unless you be converted, and become as little children, you

[1] Mark X. 14.

shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of heaven. And he that shall receive one such little child in My name, receiveth Me."[1] The child, whether considered from the standpoint of spiritual values or as the future man or woman of the State and Church is a study of much value to the presbyter.

In Sunday-school, in the parish school, in First Communion classes and Confirmation classes, children come under the direct influence of the pastor. In the priest's romance the joys and happiness incident to his life are immeasurably increased by his work among children. All youth has a natural charm. The young of all the animals have their peculiar enchantment. The shyness of the fawn, together with its slender form, makes a lasting impression on the beholder. The limpid eyes of a gazelle seem to greet you with a welcome that entreatingly pleads, Protect me. Even the bud of the rose has a special attractiveness that

[1] Matt. XVIII. 3–5.

is not found in the opened corolla. But a child is the most pleasing, the most wonderful of all the young found in Nature.

Strange as it may seem, a child appears to understand quite readily the ideal of the priesthood when it is explained to him. Children are very serious and we children of an older growth often mar their earnestness by trifling with them when they propose a serious question. The priest in his contacts with them learns much of child-life. They narrate to him their fears, their expectations, their difficulties, their ambitions. They question him on matters which are of much concern to themselves but comparatively little concern to adult life. He is their friend and confidant, their instructor and confessor, their priest and their pastor, their man of God, who explains to them God and His perfections. The Levite is often for them the first man to open the great wonderbook, Nature, which is God's great wonder-world. By his aid a child sees every tree, each shrub, and all flowers and fruits as part of God's great plant or vegetable kingdom. He intro-

duces the mineral kingdom to them, and demonstrates how wonderfully, for ages, God has allowed it to work for man's welfare. Lastly he demonstrates how every animal, from the tiniest amœba to the giant elephant, was created by God in order to minister in some way for man's benefit. Often the priest is the first person to analyze for the child how man, although an animal, differs from all other animals in creation, inasmuch as he alone has personality and rationality and an immortal soul. The child is taught how God made animals for man. What passes for intelligence in animals is really due to instinct. They perish with their death, but the soul in man cannot die and on the Judgment Day all the bodies of every child and every man that ever lived will rise again and from that time for all eternity the body and soul will endure together.

Is the effort expended on the child remunerative? Possibly, considered by worldly standards, the answer would be negative, but the priest sees in each child a probable inhabitant

of heaven. His life, his ideal is to populate heaven with the flock that his bishop, under God, assigns to him, and with every other soul that may come to him. He sees in the innocence of the child the great antithesis to hypocrisy and dissimulation. He notes in the pure eyes of children a reflection of God's purity. Their lips seldom speak any guile and in a degree Nathanael lives again.

Their conversation in their youthful years illustrates for him in many ways earth's first language. Does the child respond to the instruction of the adult? The question can be answered affirmatively. There are exceptions, but they are only another method of proving the rule. The lessons learned in youth make a lasting impression. The sacrifices and efforts made by countless priests for men and women in their earlier days form some of the most vital pages in the printed and unprinted biographies of many who today are leaders in every sphere of life. Reflections on those years have heightened the realization of what immense service the priest accomplished for

them. Occasionally the priest has gone to his eternal home before the full import of his life is realized by many whom he aided in their youthful years.

But human reward was not his ideal. His romance was sweet in the knowledge that he was striving to make them better citizens and better Christians. His only reward was the hope that the Father would not consider him altogether an unprofitable servant, but on the Last Day would utter the words: "Well done, good and faithful servant: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."[1]

[1] Matt. XXV. 21.

CHAPTER XII

Value of the Priest to Man

XII

VALUE OF THE PRIEST TO MAN

"And a path and a way shall be there, and it shall be called the holy way."[1]

IN THE world in which we live there are certain standards by which men judge one another. For too many these standards are not based on the doctrines of Jesus Christ. The Sermon on the Mount is interesting to the world as a literary diversion, but when you ask most people to change their life in conformity with its maxims, they gaze at you in astonishment, phrase some sentence which might be fulsomely epitomized as their "philosophy of life," and thenceforth you can no longer secure from them even an audience.

The world is anxious for fame, honors, high office, wealth, distinction. Christ came and

[1] Isaias XXXV. 8.

said: "For what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul?"[1] "He that findeth his life, shall lose it: and he that shall lose his life for Me shall find it.[2] "Learn of Me because I am meek, and humble of heart."[3] The standard of Jesus is the Cross: Self-renunciation, ignominy, if need be, humility, patience, endurance of injuries, kindness, not seeking one's own but displaying anxiety to aid one's neighbor. The primal Christian culture is the lesson learned from the study of the Cross.

The world is busy with its pleasure. In its social activity it labors and even sweats. Some times from early morn until late at night, the leaders in the so-called smart set toil. For what?—for the shouts of men; to have their names on the front page of the morning or evening paper, to be on the lips of countless numbers, to be featured in the tabloid or the Sunday rotogravure. Is the world ambitious? Take some of the prominent political offices. In our own country there are instances where

[1] Mark VIII. 36. [2] Matt. X. 39. [3] Matt. XI. 29.

it has been admitted under oath that more than a million dollars were expended in the primaries for a single political nomination by the friends of the man seeking a senatorship. Do men want possessions? Yes, a winter home in a salubrious climate; a palace near some large city, the largest if possible; the most expensive paintings to adorn their walls, a racing stable, a yacht, a regiment of servants, a fleet of automobiles. Is there anything to quicken this life of the socially ambitious? Yes, the press is forced to feature this news. Its daily mention has well-nigh become an axiom. The picture section must give them prominence. To keep their readers the magazine must accept fiction that generally ends with the hero being able to wed the heroine and provide her with every luxury, or attain some high political office which will indirectly bolster her social prestige.

The motion picture portrays the chief incident in a scenario wherein honors, titles, great distinction, fame or marital infidelity are vividly impressed upon the audience. The priest realizes that the world's ideal gains momentum

from daily feeding on news, novels, pictures and conversation that oppose the ideal of Christ and the civilization grounded on the lessons of Calvary. Into this world, which, superficially at least, seems to show hostility, the priest, his ideal and his romance, enters. His true value the world little appreciates. He must manifest to them his ideal. There is only one cure, one panacea for the world. That is the doctrine of Jesus Christ. The priest, as the representative of the Church, has the message of Christ to deliver. Long years ago, the Galilean when about to ascend to His Heavenly Father uttered these momentous words to His Apostles, the first Christian priests: "Go ye into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature . . . Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."[1]

From that day to this, in every age, in every clime, there have been duly ordained priests, enunciating the doctrines of the meek and eloquent Child of Mary. They have promulgated to the world that you cannot sow materialism

[1] Matt. XXVIII. 20.

and reap virtue—nay, rather, you will harvest crime. They have proclaimed in the twentieth as well as the first century that you cannot teach in college and university that God is a myth; that an immortal soul is a pious dream, and Christian morality a delusion, without your pupils acting as if these enunciations were true, without a consequent increase in robbery and rapine. Why should a father be surprised if his son act like a beast and practise the morality of the barn-yard, when he has sent him to a college or university where it is graphically taught and pictured that man is nothing other than an ape? The priest goes into the world to teach men to save their souls through belief in Jesus Christ; often he is opposed in his efforts by educated men, who believe neither in a soul nor in Jesus Christ. The priest's message to mankind is nothing other than that as a result of original sin all men are weak in making progress. They need the grace of the Sacraments to strengthen them to battle against the triple alliance, the foolishness of the world, the temptations of the satellites of the

invisible kingdom of evil, and their own concupiscences. Without the proper recognition of God, and belief in His Church, without the partaking of His Sacraments and especially the Sacrament that He instituted on the night of the Last Supper, home-life and all that it signifies will sink into that chaos which swallowed the materialistic civilization of Egypt, Babylon, Greece, and Rome.

The priest's mission in the world is not to teach the man and woman in the world to renounce the world, its labors, its pleasures, its honors, nor to abandon wealth, success, science, social prestige, but it is to teach them that if these things do not lead them to God they are empty and useless. Christ advised the rich young man, who wished to know what he should do to obtain eternal salvation, to keep the commandments. Beyond the precept He gave counsel, "If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come follow Me."[1] It is possible for the richest man or the

[1] Matt. XIX. 21.

richest woman in the world to be the poorest in spirit, but it is not possible without the grace of God, and Christ instituted Sacraments for channels whereby grace flows. Christ as the Son of God possessed all things, nevertheless He was the poorest in spirit and the meekest of men. So it is possible to occupy the highest position in the world, to possess all that is possible for man to own, and yet be Christ-like in spirit. But it is impossible without acknowledging Him and His doctrines. In the *"Imitation of Christ"* we read:

"For I perceive two things to be particularly necessary for me: food and light. Thou hast given me Thy sacred Body for the refreshment of my soul and body and Thy Word as a lamp for my feet . . . These may be called the two tables placed in the treasury of the Holy Church. One is the sacred altar, having the Holy Bread, the other the Divine Law, Thy holy doctrine."[1]

Transferring the simile we can say, Jesus Christ is the beacon-light for the world. The

[1] Bk. IV. Ch. XI.

beacon only warns. It compels only through reason and faith in the nation or in the men who erected it. Christ is the light for the world; His doctrine, being divine, respects man's great gift, free will. His light compels not; right reason and faith warn man to avoid the hidden shoals of materialism and infidelity which await all voyagers on life's stream who fail to give attention to that light. Our voyage may be stormy, but if we are guided by that light we are certain to arrive safely at our proper destination.

The priest vows celibacy. Some in the world fail to understand why, unlike other men, he should live alone. Christ lived a celibate life, as did also Saint John the Baptist, Saint John the Evangelist, Saint Paul and many others. Were we to catalogue the men who practised the vow of chastity and yet lived in the world and labored much for mankind, the enumeration of the names alone would fill volumes.

There are many motives for the priest's taking the vow of chastity, only a few of which we shall mention here. The primal motive flows

from the very nature of his romance. He senses God calling him. His meditations, his vocation, beget the realization that the Creator of the universe craves for the love of His creatures. He thirsts for the love of His legate. Therefore it is not sufficient for the romancer to give Him his soul. No, he will give Him all, his body as well; body and soul, not for a day, not for a year, but for the days and years of his earthly pilgrimage. Again, the doctrine of the Communion of Saints compares the Church on earth to an army militant. Now it is a well-known axiom in warfare that a man at the front must be alone. His only companions are comrade soldiers, each and every man striving to conquer the enemy, imbued with one ideal, the saving of their country, anxious to be victorious, so that their beloved ones may be saved. The priest is a leader in the army of the Church militant. He is in the vanguard. He must lead the fight. He must be alone, except for his fellow-priests. There is an enemy to be conquered. The greatest battle will be against himself. The priest takes the vow of chastity

not by way of urging the laymen to follow his example, but to remind him that if he, the Levite, an officer in the army of the Church Militant, abstains from marriage, then the laymen must abstain from breaking the sixth general order from the Commander-in-chief in heaven: "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Unless this precept is kept the maiden is in danger and family life crashes with the fury of a hurricane.

Christian society depends for its well-being upon all the reservoirs of self-sacrifice, self-denial and heroism that can be found in man's nature. Unless the spiritual forces latent in a nation function, internal decomposition will result, and the spiritual civilization of the race will die. The romance of the priest revitalizes the religious problem of social life. Its ideal, setting high above ordinary ideals, elevates humanity in presence of the Creator, but the ratio is lost to each generation if they turn deaf ears to the precepts originally echoed by the living voice of the Man of Nazareth. In that ideal, service first to God and next to our neighbor

necessarily follow belief. Examined in terms of value the priest's romance teaches the nation to come to God through example. Is example everything? Let Edmund Burke reply: "Example is everything. Example is the common school of mankind. They will learn at no other."

The next mighty value to mankind of the priest's romance is acceptance of the basic doctrines which came from the Son of God. These doctrines ultimately lead man to the Cross and it is the culture that comes from the Cross which constitutes the greatest training or refining for the moral and intellectual faculties of a man. Next comes service to his fellowman. Every day, without even the town's inhabitants knowing it, the priest, unheralded and unsung, is performing service to his fellowmen, more often in the humbler walks of life, but nevertheless just as effectively for society. He teaches them to lift their voices in praise to Him who is mighty and who regards the humility of the hewers of wood and the carriers of water. The value of the priest to society cannot

be estimated because man cannot adequately estimate spiritual standards, but in plant life we find phenomena that may furnish us with a standard for estimating the value of the priest's hidden life. The root or radix is the descending axis of the embryo of the plant or the tree that is contained in the seed. Its function is to absorb nutriment from the soil for the entire plant or tree. A common characteristic of the root is its tendency to hide itself from the surface. Strange as it may seem, the plants prosper in proportion to its capacity for this work and its effectiveness in giving nourishment to the ascending stem and leaves.

In the life of the priest let us take next Saturday. Possibly a million Christians throughout the world will partake of the grace of the Sacrament of Penance. Probably each of those million souls will leave the confessional with a new grace, new spiritual vigor, new resolves to conquer self, new resolutions to serve others better, to fight the good fight of faith and to lay hold on eternal life. The world little appreciates, rarely notices, values less, this tremendous,

hidden work of the Levite. Nevertheless it is this life of the invigorated soul that carries man forward. For the progress that finally counts is the progress of man, small beyond words though he is in this cosmic scheme, learning the lesson of creation, revelation and his ultimate destiny, the saving of his immortal soul.

CHAPTER XIII

The Levite's Mother

XIII

THE LEVITE'S MOTHER

A PICTURE of a creature that affords delight supreme to the wayfarer man, is given by Christian Revelation. Maidenhood and motherhood, virginity and maternity are found in one treasure of the human race, the sweetest, rarest, and, spiritually, the most beautiful woman who ever existed. In the early chapters of Genesis we find the promise of her as the buoyant hope against despair, for the first human transgressors. They heard that message that betokened their guilt. They listened to a promise that one day was to change their descendants' horizon: "I will put enmities between thee and the woman and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel."[1]

[1] Genesis III. 15.

In time she came. She links the twilight of the old revelation to the dawn of the new. For the belief in the Redeemer to come formed the twilight of faith for the chosen people of yesterday, as the faith in the divinity of her Offspring, Jesus Christ, affords the only supernatural light for the pilgrim of today. Her name is Mary and how sweet a name! Her memory is as verdant and as fresh in the twentieth as it was in the first century. She is Heaven's choicest favor for the sinful children of men, and it has been gracefully penned that she is "our tainted nature's solitary boast." We call her the Blessed Virgin, Mother Mary. Blessed she was, blessed she has been, blessed she will always be. Her own prophecy has been fulfilled, from the days of its utterance to this very moment. "For behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed."[1]

Does man want more evidence for her title of Blessed? Let him read the twenty-eighth verse of St. Luke's first chapter: "The angel being come in, said unto her: Hail, full of

[1] Luke I. 48.

grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women." Angelic testimony is adduced in her favor. Gabriel attests that she is full of grace. He, God's messenger, sounds heaven's truth: "Blessed art thou among women." Since Christ came, and wherever His gospel has been preached, her name has been held in reverence. Each generation succeeds its predecessor by finding out more evidence as to the reason why a heavenly witness uttered such tremendous words as those with which Gabriel greeted Miriam. The plenitude of grace in Mary required the combined intellectual efforts of generations in order that her special prerogatives might be better understood. She is like Nature itself. Each generation investigates Nature's elements and leaves a certain heritage to the investigators who follow. In God's Church, where Mary has been honored in a manner befitting the mystery of the Incarnation, each century has made her status more clear. The generations to come will add more testimony to the efficacy of her cultus. For her title we add the word Virgin

to the adjective Blessed. How pure is the idea in the word Virgin, what associations it connotes! The basest man who ever existed must have experienced some sensation of purity at its concept. When you prefix Blessed to the enunciation, she appears, whom Fra Angelico represented so well in the midst of his angels, and whom the Wise Men must have recognized in the innocence and loveliness of her countenance.

Among Christian people, excepting the names God and Jesus, the most beloved name is *Mother.* The very thought of Mother brings a troop of ideas to our minds. Home, happiness, sincerity, fidelity, sacrifice, patience, rush across our mental vision and mother stands as the ideal type of Nature's greatest treasure. In the supernatural sense Christ's Mother, Earth's greatest Mother, is likewise our Mother. In His last pulpit address from the rostrum of the Cross, among His Seven Last Words we read the following: "When Jesus therefore had seen His mother and the disciple standing, whom He loved, He saith to His mother: 'Woman

behold thy son' and after that He saith to the disciple, 'Behold thy Mother.' And from that hour, the disciple took her to his own."

In that hour Saint John represented the entire human race. Christ, about to die, took care of His Mother and He gave her, His precious jewel, to us. In addressing Mary, His Mother, He requested her to behold in John her spiritual son and since that hour the followers of Christ, understanding their Master's language, have taken Mary unto their own. Mother Mary is the spiritual mother of the children of men. She is man's sweetest delight in this vale of tears. She buoys his drooping spirit when he suffers from spiritual ennui. She invigorates his soul with hope when despair tempts him to break the bonds that keep him in God's grace. Her hidden life is a secure refuge against the pride of the world. From the painting attributed to Saint Luke, to the Sistine Madonna, her inspiration has given painters the stimuli for representing pure maidenhood and motherhood for what they should be, Nature's greatest asset. Study Michelangelo's

"Pieta," one of the most noble delineations of sculpture, and learn what Mary has meant to that art. In architecture, Mary seems to have wielded her influence to a most high degree of excellence. Ponder a while the inscription carved into the stone above the massive doors at Rheims, for therein is found the significance of Notre Dame de Rheims. Go next to Milan and examine that Gothic tabernacle to the living God and again Mary's memory is recorded. Notre Dame de Paris and Notre Dame de Chartres, *Die Jungfrau* of Munich, the Madonna di Firenze and countless other cathedrals and churches in every land attest the beautiful concept known on earth as Our Lady. In fact all the arts have been enriched by the reality of her existence. Music has reechoed some of the celestial strains and repetitions of the most pleasing and harmonious sounds with her memory and her Son's fruitful life as the motif. Poets and prose writers in every age have sung and chanted the sweetest songs and delivered inspiring messages of the fairest lily of Israel. To each of her sons and

daughters Mary, our blessed Mother, presents a different aspect. She lives in a twofold sense; to those who believe with the Church, she lives as Queen of heaven, Queen of angels and of saints. Mary is their advocate during life, their secure refuge at the hour of death. For those who are not of the faith, Mary lives, she exercises an influence proportionate to their love of purity and beauty, their desire of justice and truth.

But Mary, Lady of all Christians, is especially the Madonna of the priest. Every morning he meets her at the Bethlehem of the Mass. There he beholds the Queen of martyrs standing at the foot of the Cross, and the oblation of Calvary, the daily mystic death of Christ in the unbloody Sacrifice of the New Law, only reiterates Miriam's oblation on the day when the sword pierced her heart. Hence, from early morning Mass until Vesper's twilight, Mary lives spiritually in the life of a priest. As evening shadows fall on man's vision, the Levite chants the Magnificat, the noble poem of the youthful Israelite poetess. Its

canticle vividly recalls the intellectual vigor of this maiden of Juda, who at sixteen years of age knew so much and observed so well. As he completes his evening prayer at Completorium, his swan-song for the day's demise is Simeon's *Nunc Dimittis,* uttered in Mary's presence, and containing the prophecy that her Son is the light to the revelation of the nations and the glory of her people Israel.

Night and darkness close in on the Levite, but where Christ lives in the heart of man there can be no real darkness, and in the midst of the blackest night, Our Lady with her Child in her arms, breathing purity by her spiritual exhalations, casting a love-light from her eyes with her lips circling in a smile, graciously bends over the laborer in her Son's vineyard and calms his unruly fears as she tenderly whispers, "Remember, I am thy Alma Mater." In his romance at the altar the follower of the Nazarene nightly takes his leave of the Sacramental Presence. The day's work is done. He has placed the fruit of his service in the custody of her to whom Dante

appealed in the last canto of the *Paradiso.* The light of the sanctuary lamp affords rays that brighten the path to the church door. As the laborer looks back to the tabernacle, Mary's image in the marble whiteness can be seen, and with a feeling of emotion, he unconsciously repeats: "Mother, I love thee . . . Pray for me now, and at the hour of my death."

The sacerdotal life, like all life, experiences a quest for new values. Nature has its grandeur, the song of birds its attraction, the ocean's expanse appears often unlimited, and many times the voice of a child seems the sweetest music. Mary, the Virgin Mother, in the language of the Canticle of Canticles, is the flower of the field, the lily of the valleys, spikenard and saffron, sweet cane and cinnamon, mighty as all the trees of Libanus, containing myrrh and aloes and every perfume. Her beloved voice cometh leaping over the mountains, skipping over the hills. Her eyes are as dove's eyes, her lips as scarlet lace and her speech is sweet. Her cheeks are as a piece of pomegranate, the fragrance of her garments as the aroma of frankin-

cense. She is Christ's Mother, the tenderest of mothers; she was most beautiful in soul, because she was full of grace. She lives for every man, but she means much more to the Levite. In his supreme moments of belief, he realizes full well Paul's words: "And I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me."[1] Therefore if he is to be another Christ continuing his spiritual ministration until the Master comes, Mary, by virtue of his dual responsibilities, is his Mother. John, one of the first priests of the New Law, was given the custody of Miriam. Christ asked her to regard John as her son. Therefore the ordained successor of John must strive to take the beloved disciple's place and perceive in the greatest of all mothers, his Mother.

[1] Galatians II. 20.

CHAPTER XIV

Failure Of Romance

XIV

FAILURE OF ROMANCE

THE CYNIC insists that human romance is false because it fails. Almost in the same breath he exclaims that sacerdotal romance is false, since in particular individuals the Levite's ideal fails to persevere. It is a fact that the divorce court jars the tenderness of many a human romance, but the great percentage of divorces would not destroy the fact of romance while even one true human romance could be found on earth. The most precious stone in existence is still a jewel as long as one of its variety remains. The priest's romance has failures. In the first century of the Christian era we find Judas. There can be no doubt of the vocation of Judas. He was called by Christ. He was honored by the Master. The only portfolio in the cabinet of the Nazarene's administration was conferred

on Judas. He was the treasurer. Was he ordained? Did he partake of the first Holy Communion? Was he present at the First Mass which was the Last Supper? Did he hear those words of ordination, "Do this in commemoration of Me?"[1] Judas failed. Since his day there have been failures, but from reliable records it cannot be adduced that the percentage has ever been as high as it was even in Christ's day, one out of every twelve.

Why is there failure in sacerdotal romance? Primarily because the Levite has not been generous with his God. In the failure of a human romance, two persons may be partly to blame. Often it is difficult to form a correct judgment as to whom is the offender in the shattering of the love between two souls who at one time loved each other so affectionately. However, in the priest's failure to persevere in his romance with his Creator, to continue to keep his vow of chastity, one alone is to blame, i.e., the priest. The good God yearns for the love of His creature. From Saint Paul's first

[1] Luke XXII. 19.

Epiſtle to the Corinthians, we learn that the celibate ſtate is higher than the married ſtate, provided the motive is to practise abſtinence for the sake of an oblation to the Creator of Life, who formed all life. On the day of ordination the Levite took upon himself the vows which diſtinguish the Chriſtian prieſthood. For almoſt nineteen hundred years men of all nations, of all climes, have taken these vows. This life can be lived. The ideal is possible. Hiſtory affords ample evidence in proof of the ſtatement. However, chaſtity should be combined with good works, and unless both are present in the Levite he will never become God's spiritual messenger, sent down life's highway to rouse men to spiritual combat. No soul who has been generous with his God has ever failed. With all due reſpect to every man who has ever made his act of oblation, the failures in the sacerdotal romance come when the Levite becomes more and more intereſted in material things, deeply ſteeped in the cares and pleasures of the world, and willing to follow the line of leaſt reſiſtance in spiritual

values. Often it is a repetition of Absalom, attempting to establish a new kingdom instead of the kingdom of the Father.

In proportion to the Levite's solicitude for material things his sense of spiritual values weakens, and in time, if he fail to chastise his body and bring it into subjection, the fervor of his youthful enthusiasm grows faint. If he continue in this course his faith becomes but a shadow and occasionally vanishes altogether. When faith is lost he who has failed feels belief is unreal, but his logic suffers with the ebbing away of trust in God. He is like a blind man who states that light is unreal because he is without a medium to intercept and reflect it. One particular virtue will save the priest from failure in his romance, that is, holiness. Holiness demands a talent, a special sort of talent, and it is developed in solitude. The Levite will find his peace and cultivate holiness in much patience. Even if he live in the midst of the world, his soul can cultivate solitude and he must yearn for what Wordsworth described:

"What but this,
The longing for confirmed tranquillity
Inward and outward; humble yet sublime:
The life where hope and memory are as one;
Earth quiet and unchanged; the human soul
Consistent in self-rule; and heaven revealed
To meditation in that quietness!"

Even if men of the world regard holiness as only a taste, there is need in the world for such a taste, just as there is a need for refining man's nature. Although this taste for holiness will never be universal, neither is the taste for refinement universal. It is a fact that the love for the Creator, the love of his God that changed Augustine the sinner to Augustine the saint, is needed in our world today. Likewise, the man who vows celibacy for the intense love of God so that he may think on the things of the Lord, that he may behold both in body and in spirit, is as necessary for the world in the twentieth century as he was in the year 58 when Paul wrote his letter to the Corinthians.

The Levite who fails in his romance may not be a true decadent. He only suffers in the ratio of his treason. Often, yet not often enough, he comes back at the end to his Mother, the beauty that is ever ancient, but always new, and "lays his broken body in consecrated ground," and the Mother follows "this bruised soul with her pitiful, asperging prayers." Society suffers with his failure. For it records the defeat of one of her sons. In the strength of his manhood he attained the nobility of spirit of the noble, but when tried by the dry sands of materialism his strength faded like a mirage.

CHAPTER XV

Consummatum Est

XV

CONSUMMATUM EST

ALL TERRESTIAL life, whether it be organic or inorganic, vegetable or animal, has its terminus. Likewise, the planets and planetoids are daily pursuing a course which is bringing them nearer to their termination. Man is no exception to this common law of Nature. The strongest rational creature who ever lived on earth reaches a day when death envelops him in mystery and his soul commences a journey to that Wonderland which is veiled to our gaze. The sweetest human romance, be it as noble in emotion as the love of Dante for Beatrice, comes upon a period of anguish and pain, the severance of the bonds of personal communication, the death of the beloved.

In the sacerdotal romance there is a direct

antithesis in the final scenes to the last curtain-call of human romance. The priest's life is a privileged existence, because he is assured that every day has a special significance for him. This is true of every human life, but often those who are choked up with the cares and riches of the world fail to see, in the white fleecy clouds rolling across the blue before them which spell out a day, the great value of time, which crystallizes into their eternal mansion. The graces incident to the faithful pursuit of the Levite's ideal bring him three special benedictions; the realization of the presence of God, the grace of perseverance, and the constant realization that time is the most precious jewel in the world. Saint John states that he heard a voice from heaven saying to him: "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. From henceforth now, saith the spirit, that they may rest from their labors; for their works follow them."[1]

If, then, eternal happiness will be in proportion to our works here on earth, assuredly every

[1] Apoc. XIV. 13.

day is a jewel, whose brilliance depends upon our daily efforts. If the day's labor has been fruitless, then the jewel of the day has turned into dull carbon, while if we have been faithful to the commands of the Creator, and have labored for God and our brother, the twilight of the day's decline bears to the Master of Life a dazzling diamond. Nor is this daily transformation alien to Nature's own drama. What are clouds, but collected particles of vapor which have been distilled from Mother Earth's steaming cauldron, and condensed sufficiently to allow man to sense Nature's transformation? What is snow, but another form of vapor, greenish in tint, pulverized into frozen breath? What are white-caps, but agitated surfaces which have lashed and clashed themselves into foam, only other appearances born of water, like dew, rain, mist, frost, hail, ice and snow. What is the diamond, but the transformation of the blackest carbon? Diamonds are found in the craters of extinct volcanoes. "By immense pressure, through intense heat, the black carbon is permeated in its every minute

particle with a force which rearranges its whole being."

Hence the romance of the priest teaches him the daily lessons of the great Lover who created all. Each day Nature's beauty seems more interesting. Each lesson learned from science brings a deeper insight into life's mystery, and each contact with his fellowman impresses upon him the force of the truth that "to know all is to forgive all." The Christian priest sees in every human soul an image of the Creator. How the man or woman may appear in the eyes of mankind is not the final standard. For he knows from the lesson of the diamond that by God's grace the greatest sinner can become a great saint. The carbon could easily say, "I am not as black as I seem. If you could see each atom through and through, every speck of my blackness would be lost in white glory." Hence, the goal of the priest is to diffuse charity, to promulgate to the nations Christ's message of affection and to teach man that next to the love of God, the great commandment of the law is the love of our neigh-

bor. If volcanoes make diamonds, man is able to canonize within himself his fellowman, and if God is infinitely forgiving He likewise has infinite intelligence. The love of the priest for God only intensifies the Creator's love for His creatures. *Tempus fugit;* the years rapidly run by. The hour of dissolution approaches, but the priest's death is the climax of his romance.

As we watch the curtain fall for the last time on the stage of a sacerdotal career, we learn that even in death the priest's romance is the most enduring, for death, which breaks the threads of earthly romance, only enriches the follower of Melchisedech. Christ, whom he has seen only in disguise, now comes, and instead of a sense of loss at the approach of the grim reaper, he utters, in the language of Saint Paul, "I long to be dissolved and to be with Christ," or in the language of another romancer, "Behold, whom I have desired eagerly, now I shall see; whom I have hoped for, now I shall possess and I shall be united to Him in heaven, whose presence and whose affection I attempted to cultivate while on earth."

The priest dies, but what we call death is only the beginning of eternal life. His great value to the world consisted in the fact that he brought the knowledge of revelation to hundreds of souls. He drew back the veil and opened to many the land beyond the grave. Furthermore he preached in season and out of season, "that physical man is important only in relation to spiritual man," and that no man can, "know himself" if he "presume not God to scan." His theme had been the great theme of all ages, of all people. It has been the universal theme. For the Levite enunciated to his contemporary generation the great truth . . . There is a God. He is the Creator of all life.

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